Promotions of Scientists and Engineers in Research, Development and Expert Positions to Sr. (GS-14/15) Levels

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Topic Area of Authority
Human Resources
Policy Statement
The Office of Research and Development (ORD) will provide fair and equitable career advancement opportunities for all scientific and technical employees. This policy specifically addresses the promotion of scientists and engineers to senior (GS-14/15) research, development, or expert positions. It provides updated policy guidance and procedures for the determination of grade level for these types of positions as prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification guides and standards (See References). This policy applies to internal ORD promotions and transfers at the GS-14/15 level.

This policy supports the concept of a "dual career track" for laboratory scientists and engineers. It is designed to recognize the grade value of non-supervisory performance, which involves a very high degree of technical independence, a high degree of originality, and a high level of professional recognition and performance. This document does not address the procedures for advancement to Supervisory/Managerial and Scientific Program Management positions. For information on advancement through management positions, please consult the local servicing Shared Service Center (SSC).

Use of peer review panels to evaluate the qualifications and contributions of an individual in research, development, or expert positions is recommended in the OPM guidance. Therefore, it is the policy of ORD that laboratories, centers, or offices with these positions shall establish peer review panels, known as Technical Qualifications Boards (TQBs) to review and evaluate the qualifications and contributions of its candidates for promotion to senior (GS-14/15) levels.

Furthermore, in conjunction with OPM classification criteria, the candidate's body of work should also demonstrate the significance of the science, it's relevance to EPA's mission, and the impact it has had on decision making, and/or responding to Agency needs.

Background
In 1985, ORD and the Personnel Management Division developed and published procedures describing promotions for ORD scientists and engineers. The document described promotion opportunities to the GS-14 and GS-15 levels based on technical expertise and responsibility. It required that promotion to these positions would be subject to a peer panel review.

Several years after the original policy was developed, the review and promotion process was modified. ORD issued a document in August 1989, which clarified the newly adopted policy entitled "ORD Policy and Procedures Manual, Chapter 5.9."

Since then, several ORD transmittals have been issued to clarify or revise the 1989 policy. In addition, ORD reorganized in FY 1995 and made changes to the overall organizational structure. Moreover, on August 25, 1998, attendees of an ORD-wide summit reached consensus on streamlining the 1989 policy. These streamlined changes were included in a revised policy dated November 2, 2000.

In 2015, a TQB Lean event was held to find ways to further streamline the TQB process. As a result of this event, this revised 2018 policy was developed to update some of the referenced organizations and procedures that had become obsolete over the last 18 years. Additionally, this policy was updated to

incorporate ORD's new guidelines for policy format and structure, which include removing the actual procedures from the policy document and incorporating them into a new TQB Standard Operating Procedures document, which will supplement this policy.

Signed Memo

Signed TQB Decision Memo_8.22.22.pdf

Related Procedures

TQB SOP Promotions of Scientists and Engineers in Research, Development and Expert Positions to Sr. (GS-14/15) Levels

Supplemental Documents

ORD Policies and Procedures Manual Chapter Section 2.11 6_3_22.pdf

Roles and Responsibilities

Role: Other
First Line Supervisors

The second-line supervisor reviews the PDP that has been entered into the OTRS by the first-line supervisor and either concurs with the recommendation for a TQB review, or contacts the 1st line supervisor for further discussion. If the final decision is not to move forward at that time with a TQB review, the second-line supervisor notifies the candidate of the decision, also providing a written explanation, and informs the candidate of his/her right to file a position classification appeal with either the Agency or OPM. If the package is moving forward, the second-line supervisor selects potential ad hoc members from the original list of ten references to serve as voting members. Additionally, they ask three of the ten references to provide written letters of recommendation for the candidate and provide instructions for completing this task. At the conclusion of the process, the second-line supervisor is responsible for communicating the TQB's finding to the candidate.

Role: Other
Second-Line Supervisors

The second-line supervisor reviews the PDP that has been entered into the OTRS by the first-line supervisor and either concurs with the recommendation for a TQB review, or contacts the 1st line supervisor for further discussion. If the final decision is not to move forward at that time with a TQB review, the second-line supervisor notifies the candidate of the decision, also providing a written explanation, and informs the candidate of his/her right to file a position classification appeal with either the Agency or OPM. If the package is moving forward, the second-line supervisor selects potential ad hoc members from the original list of ten references to serve as voting members. Additionally, they ask three of the ten references to provide written letters of recommendation for the candidate and
provide instructions for completing this task. At the conclusion of the process, the second-line supervisor is responsible for communicating the TQB's finding to the candidate.

Role: C/O and National Program Director
In general, LD/CD/ODs are responsible for establishing effective career advancement opportunities for all employees within the L/C/O. TQB findings are forwarded to the LD/CD/ODs who will make the final decision to either concur or not concur with the TQB's recommendations. LD/CD/ODs are responsible for notifying the second-line supervisor of the finding of the TQB.

Role: Other
Chairperson of the Technical Qualifications Board (TQB)

The chairperson convenes and presides over the TQB. After the TQB meeting, the chairperson prepares a summary report of the Board's findings. The chairperson notifies the LD/CD/OD (or their designee) and the Shared Service Center (SSC) of the results of the peer review process.

Role: Other
TQB Panel Members

TQB panel members are responsible for conducting the peer review process in an objective manner, participating in all TQB proceedings when called upon and for adhering strictly to confidentiality standards and Privacy Act regulations.

Role: Other
Shared Service Center (SSC)

The SSC provides advice and guidance to LD/CD/ODs and supervisors regarding classification of the new position. They may be asked for advice and consultation throughout the process and will ensure a classifier is available by phone during the actual TQB review. The SSC classifier receives the final TQB recommendation and completes the process of classifying the position to determine the appropriate grade.

Role: Other
Technical Qualifications Board (TQB) Coordinator

The TQB Coordinator is typically the lead HR analyst servicing the LCO where the candidate's package originates. They are responsible for the administrative functions associated with setting up a TQB. These include initial assistance for the first-line supervisor in preparation of the new Position Description (PD), working with the TQB Chair to obtain letter writer and ad hoc names, and searching the pool of potential panel members and contacting those selected to gather availability information, conflict of interest forms, etc. The TQB Coordinator arranges for space, phone lines, etc. needed for the meeting. They are responsible for completing the necessary steps to get a professional services contracts in place to cover the assistance of the ad hoc(s) in the process. They attend the TQB meeting, assist the Chair when needed, and take a final tally of the votes. After completion of the TQB, the Coordinator prepares the final actions for the recommended promotion and submits them to the Shared Service Center for classification and promotion procedures.

Definitions

Ad Hoc
Members of the TQB from outside of the agency who provide a broad scientific and technical perspective on the candidate's expertise.

Shared Service Center (SSC) Classification
The SSC Classifier determines the final classification for the position and notifies the LD/CD/OD of the action. The LD/CD/OD advises the candidate's second-line supervisor and the candidate of the action taken.

Lean
Lean is a set of principles and methods used to identify and eliminate waste in any process. Lean helps organizations improve the speed and quality of their processes by getting rid of unnecessary activity such as document errors, extra process steps, and waiting time.

ORD TQB Request System (OTRS)
The electronic database where applicant promotion packages are input and continue routing through for review and approvals. The database allows the applicant to view the current stage/status of the package throughout the process.

Promotion Documentation Package (PDP)
Compilation of documents candidates submit for consideration by the TQB.

Technical Qualifications Board (TQB)
Panel that meets to discuss candidate's package and recommend approval or disapproval.

Governing Authorities

Reference Type: Statute
Reference Name and URL: [5 U.S.C., Part III - Employees, Subpart D - Pay and Allowances, Chapter 51 - Classification](#)

Reference Type: Regulation
Reference Name and URL: [5 CFR, Chapter 1, Subchapter A, Part 511](#)

Reference Type: Other Reference
Reference Name and URL: [OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide, Deptember 2006](#)

Reference Type: Other Reference
Reference Name and URL: [OPM Equipment Development Grade Evaluation Guide, June 1968](#)

Policy Coordinator C/O

ORM

ORD Calendar

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EPA Locator

Accessibility

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